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WORLD WILDLIFE FUND-U.S.

RIVER OTTER EXPORT

AND

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

(1981 edition)

prepared by

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TRAFFIC (U.S.A.) — Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce — is a Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Its function is to monitor the international trade in wildlife and plants. TRAFFIC (U.S.A.) is funded by World Wildlife Fund-U.S.

SYNOPSIS

Introduction

During the 1970's, 29 states trapped river otters Lutra canadensis for their pelts. A total of 227,074 otters were harvested in the United States during the last ten years (Table 1). The number taken since the early 1970's appears to have increased (Figure 1): less than 20,000 yearly were reportedly captured prior to the 1976/77 season, while over 33,000 were harvested last year. It must be noted however that prior to 1977 many states did not report trapping records. This increase over the last ten years may therefore also reflect the consequence of better reporting systems which have been recently implemented in several states.

During the 1979/80 trapping season 33,659 river otters were trapped: Louisiana reported over 9,200 taken, and Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina each trapped over 2,000 river otters during the same season. Several states have increased their river otter take: Maryland reported less than 150 otters per year taken during the early 1970's, while harvesting over 300 during the 1979/80 season; Georgia increased its annual reported take from several hundred in the early 1970's to over 3,000 per year during the last three seasons. Louisiana has consistently trapped more otters than any other state: from 5,000 to almost 12,000 river otters annually between 1970 and 1980.

CITES

After the inception of CITES in 1973, it was soon realized that many of the already listed species, including some of the otters, were still

relatively common at least in North America, or too obscure (such as the Sumatran otter) as to appear in trade. Thus, at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES held at Berne, Switzerland in 1976, it was decided that, in the future, in order to determine the appropriate Appendix onto which a species should be placed, the biological and trade status of the species should be evaluated together. These requirements for determining status, given below, are known as the "Berne Criteria."

Appendix I

1. Biological status. To qualify for Appendix I, a species must be currently threatened with extinction. Information of any of the following types is required, in order of preference: a) scientific reports on the population size or geographic range of the species based on single surveys or longitudinal studies, b) reports by reliable observers other than scientists on the population size or geographic range of the species over a number of years, or c) reports from various sources on habitat destruction, heavy trade or other potential causes of extinction. Genera should be listed if most of their species are threatened with extinction and if identification of individual species within the genus is difficult or confusing. If most of the species are not threatened, but identification of individual species is difficult, the entire larger taxon (genus or family) should be placed on Appendix II.

2. Trade status. Species meeting the biological criteria should be listed in Appendix I if they are or may be affected by international

trade. This would include any endangered species that might be expected to be traded for any purpose, scientific or otherwise. Particular attention is given to any species for which such trade might, over a period of time, involve numbers constituting a significant portion of the total population size which could be detrimental to its continued survival. The biological status and trade status of a species are often and obviously related. When biological data show a species to be declining seriously, there need be only a probability of trade. When trade is known to occur, information on the biological status need not be as complete. This principle especially applies to groups of related species such as otters, where trade or the name listed on documents can and does readily shift from one species that is well-known to another for which there is little biological information and vice versa.

Appendix II

1. Biological status. To qualify for Appendix II, species need not currently be threatened with extinction, but there should be some indication that they might become so. Such an indication might be a decreasing or very limited population size or geographic range of distribution. Information on biological status should be similar to that required for Appendix I species. Genera can be listed if some of their species are threatened and identification of individual species within the genus is difficult. For instance, all otters not listed on Appendix I are listed on Appendix II.

2. Trade status. Species meeting the biological criteria should be listed if they presently are subject to trade or are likely to become subject to trade. The latter situation can arise where heavy trade in one species is intended to include similar species if the demand grows or

if supplies of the one species are depleted. The amount of trade that a species can sustain without threat of extinction generally will be greater for species in Appendix II than for those in Appendix I, so there should be evidence of actual or expected trade in such a volume as to constitute a potential threat to survival of the species. Appendix II serves in part as a monitoring tool to gather such trade data and is not intended to curtail trade.

According to U.S. CITES Reports, the United States exported 18,931 otter skins in three years, 1977 to 1980. Most of the pelts were exported to Canada, West Germany, Switzerland, and Austria (Table 2). Assuming most pelts are exported in the Calendar Year following trapping (i.e. 1977/78 trapping season pelts were exported in Calendar Year 1978), only 9% of the 1977 otter pelts taken, 40% of the 1978 pelts and 15% of the 1979 pelts taken were actually exported. These percentages give cause for concern since the demand for river otter pelts in the United States is relatively small and most states claim that they export the majority of their otter skins to Canada and Europe. This discrepancy probably stems from the CITES Permit Office (Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior) not issuing, receiving or recording all the required export permits due to unfamiliarity of the new permit system; it is likely that in 1977 and 1978 quite a few otter skins left the United States without a CITES export permit. This discrepancy should improve over time.

Canada also has large populations of Lutra canadensis. According to otter harvest reports, 116,924 river otters were taken during the 1970/71 to 1976/77 seasons (Table 1). Canada exported over 3,400 river otter skins and 157 finished otter products in 1977 and over 4,800 skins and

189 products in 1978 (Table 4); most of the skins were exported to Italy, Switzerland, the United States, and West Germany. Based on the 1976/77 trapping records and the 1977 CITES reports, Canada exported around 17% of their harvested otters in 1977. It is likely that many more were exported, and like the United States, either CITES permits were not issued or received by the Canadian CITES authorities. Based on trapping records in the United States from 1970 to 1980 and in Canada from 1970 to 1976, a minimum of 333,998 river otters were harvested in both countries during the 1970's (Table 1). In the United States, river otter pelt prices rose from an average of $18 in 1970 to $53 in 1976, and in Canada, pelt prices increased from $28 in 1970 to around $70 in 1975 and 1976.

A total of only 10,006 Lutra canadensis skins were imported by all countries in 1977 (re-exports included) and 16,976 skins in 1978 (Table 5). An additional 87 finished products (such as coats and jackets) and 180 finished articles in 1978 were imported. West Germany imported approximately one third of the skins, and large numbers of pelts were imported by Austria, Canada, Italy, Switzerland and the United States.

Many discrepancies exist between what a country claims to export and what the importing country claims to receive from that exporting country. For example, in 1977 the United States reported exports of 434 otter skins to West Germany while West Germany recorded imports of 3,506 skins from the U.S. (Table 5). Similarly, the U.S. reported exportsof 2,187 skins to Switzerland in 1978 while Switzerland recorded imports of only 195 skins from the U.S. (Table 2). Canada reported exports of 1,540 skins to Switzerland in 1977, another 1,024 in 1978 and 1,128 in 1979 while Switzerland lists no imports of otter skins from Canada in 1977 and only 76 skins in 1978 (Table 5).

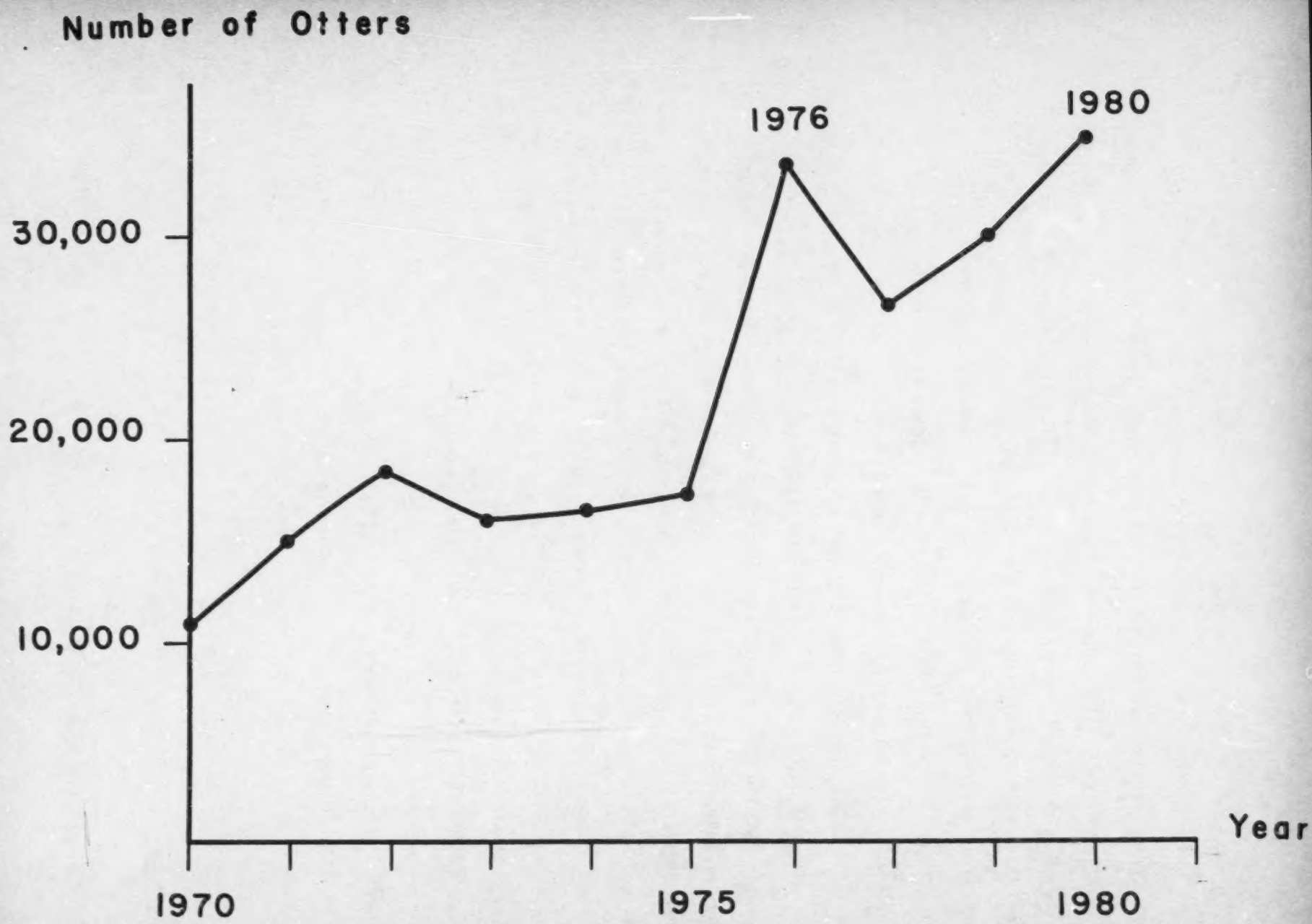
Several other species of river otter are harvested for their pelts and traded worldwide. According to CITES Reports, West Germany imported over 16,000 Lutra skins (unspecified) in 1977 and over 24,000 skins in 1978 (Tables 6 and 7); of these, 8,349 skins in 1977, 17,273 in 1978 and 20,260 in 1979 came from Paraguay, and over 2,000 to 4,000 otter skins per year were exported from Peru (all South American otters are on CITES Appendix I, i.e. threatened with eminent extinction and banned from trade). Both the United Kingdom and West Germany reported the re-export of Lutra skins in their CITES Reports (Table 6); most of these remain in Europe.

In conclusion, we can say that the trade of Lutra canadensis skins from Canada and the United States continues to thrive. High pelt prices and increased demand for otter skins by the European fur industry are the incentives, while on the other hand, pollution and habitat loss are also taking their toll of otters indirectly. CITES has been ratified by 75 nations concerned with sound conservation and management of potentially valuable species...and it is interesting to note that it is the "producing" countries which are now more conservative of their wildlife resources than "consuming" countries in the northern hemisphere. Otters are but one of the many aspects which reflect and illustrate the conflict between man's insistence to profit from whatever resources are available regardless of the consequence this may have on future generations and his concern to maintain an equilibrium in the fragile ecosystem of this planet.

References

Deems, E.F. and D. Pursley (1978). North American Furbearers, Their Management, Research and Harvest Status in 1976. Fur Resources Committee, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

FIGURE 1



Numbers of Otters Taken in the United States, 1970-1980

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Table 1

NUMBER OF RIVER OTTERS HARVESTED IN THE UNITED STATES (BY STATE) AND CANADA

	1970/71	1971/72	1972/73	1973/74	1974/75	1975/76	1976/77	1977/78	1978/79	1979/80
ALABAMA								1500	2145	3085
ALASKA	1500	2000	2570	2540	2074		3355	1981	1991	2159
ARKANSAS	56	38	76	25	37	123	363	419	749	400
CONNECTICUT		14	7	7	13	14	10	63	74	107
DELAWARE	30	25	25	25	25	25	50	70	45	62
FLORIDA						856	2883	3326	2112	2100
GEORGIA	670	222	585	453	624	495	3187	3097	3643	3597
IDAHO	40			1						
LOUISIANA	4808	5440	7668	5989	6118	5730	11900	6597	9745	9256
MAINE	588	637	593	871	1007	898	531	675	693	965
MARYLAND	131	360	218	208	141	130	182	187	262	336
MASSACHUSETTS	76	53	71	66	66	103	108	163	121	157
MICHIGAN	633	832	1152	459	609	914	910	660	730	1135
MINNESOTA		784	1079	185	315	2664		492	707	1186
MISSISSIPPI							1314	1260	952	1389
MONTANA	32	24	34	48	42	28	48	40	34	98
NEVADA	5	18	23	54	8	8	45			
NEW HAMPSHIRE	135	157	208	186	170	181	205	236	206	351
NEW YORK	171	329	413	405	496	533	636	467	677	846
NORTH CAROLINA		1606	1407	968	893	878	1390	927	1357	1617
OREGON	198	265	331	298	339	276	439	300	348	558
RHODE ISLAND	4	1					34	15	25	
SOUTH CAROLINA				526	699	783	1351	560	476	535
TENNESSEE							2			
TEXAS					3	62	63			
VERMONT			11	27	28	27	27	42	76	126
VIRGINIA	890	648	642	602	612	594	1255	1141	813	1319
WASHINGTON	359	597	557	635	691	661	1287	760	722	759
WISCONSIN	483	960	1199	1492	1269	853	1271	1053	962	1448
TOTAL	10,809	15,010	18,869	16,070	16,279	16,836	32,846	28,031	29,665	33,659
AVG. PELT PRICE	$18	$25	$35	$32	$31	$50	$53			
TOTAL CANADA HARVEST	14,848	14,958	18,466	17,749	14,942	16,029	19,932			
AV. PELT PRICE	$28	$33.50	$47	$43	$43.50	$72	$69.04			

Source: 1970/71 - 1976/77 Trapping Season Data from North American Furbearers (Deems and Pursley, 1978);

TABLE 2

EXPORT OF RIVER OTTER (*LUTRA CANADENSIS*) SKINS
FROM THE UNITED STATES
(1977 - 1979)

IMPORTING COUNTRY	1977		1978		1979		3-YR TOTAL	
	SKIN	GARMENT	SKIN	GARMENT	SKIN	GARMENT	SKIN	GARMENT
ARGENTINA	-	-	42	-	85	-	127	-
AUSTRIA	584	-	651	-	321	-	1,556	-
CANADA	452	1	3,908	-	2,440	-	6,800	1
DENMARK	-	-	283	-	-	-	283	-
ITALY	97	-	156	-	277	-	530	-
JAPAN	-	-	-	-	16	-	16	-
SWITZERLAND	279	1	2,187	-	1,217	-	3,683	1
UNITED KINGDOM	49	-	-	-	-	-	49	-
WEST GERMANY	434	-	3,644	-	690	-	4,768	-
UNSPECIFIED	1,119	-	-	-	-	-	1,119	-
TOTAL	3,014	2	10,871	-	5,046	-	18,931	2

SOURCE: UNITED STATES ANNUAL CITES REPORTS, 1977 - 1979.

TABLE 3

U.S. RIVER OTTER (LUTRA CANADENSIS) EXPORT BY STATE
(FISCAL YEAR: OCTOBER THROUGH SEPTEMBER)

	STATE	FY 1978	FY 1979
	ALABAMA	164	528
	ALASKA	1225	315
	ARKANSAS	-	50
*	COLORADO	-	1
	CONNECTICUT	13	42
	DELAWARE	0	16
	FLORIDA	325	904
	GEORGIA	794	1538
*	IDAHO	1	-
	LOUISIANA	1776	1801
	MAINE	622	549
	MARYLAND	4	170
	MASSACHUSETTS	58	98
	MICHIGAN	4	121
	MINNESOTA	137	296
	MISSISSIPPI	76	115
*	MISSOURI	-	1
	MONTANA	22	10
	NEW HAMPSHIRE	26	113
	NEW YORK	27	259
	NORTH CAROLINA	775	741
	OREGON	222	283
	RHODE ISLAND	7	21
	SOUTH CAROLINA	357	178
*	TENNESSEE	-	15
*	UTAH	-	3
	VERMONT	81	36
	VIRGINIA	452	609
	WASHINGTON	438	382
	WISCONSIN	708	376
	UNKNOWN	269	1092
	TOTAL	8,583	10,663

* These states all have closed seasons. The figures presented may actually be errors made in identifying state abbreviations on tags or in tallying.

Source: Wildlife Permit Office, FWS, USDI

TABLE 4

EXPORT OF RIVER OTTER (*LUTRA CANADENSIS*) SKINS FROM CANADA (1977 - 1979)

IMPORTING COUNTRY	1977		1978		1979		3-YR TOTAL	
	SKIN	GARMENT	SKIN	GARMENT	SKIN	GARMENT	SKIN	GARMENT
ARGENTINA	-	-	-	-	283	-	283	-
AUSTRIA	-	-	245	-	-	-	245	-
DENMARK	-	-	-	-	100	-	100	-
ITALY	943	5	585	-	736	-	2,264	5
JAPAN	37	3	-	21	97	-	134	24
SWITZERLAND	1,540	79	1,024	45	1,128	24	3,692	148
UNITED KINGDOM	49	6	24	6	27	1	100	13
UNITED STATES	705 + 86kg	43	910 + 18kg	63	755	38	2,370 + 104kg	144
WEST GERMANY	94	13	2,066	42	1,350	21	3,510	76
OTHERS	64	8	20	12	239	9	323	29
TOTAL	3,432 + 86kg	157	4,874 + 18kg	189	4,715	93	13,021 + 104kg	439

SOURCE: CANADA ANNUAL CITES REPORTS, 1977 - 1979.

TABLE 5

IMPORT OF RIVER OTTER (LUTRA CANADENSIS)

SKINS AND FINISHED PRODUCTS

COUNTRY	1977 SKIN	1977 FINISHED PRODUCT	1978 SKIN	1978 FINISHED PRODUCT	EXPORTING COUNTRY	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
ARGENTINA			(42)		USA	USA
AUSTRIA	(584)		(651)		USA	USA
			(245)	(1)	CANADA	-
	(471)				UK	-
BELGIUM			(12)	(1)	CANADA	CANADA
* CANADA	(452)	(1)	(3,908)		USA	USA
	(13)				UK	-
* DENMARK			226	(283)	USA	USA
* FINLAND	(21)				CANADA	-
			22	(22)	USA	-
* FRANCE	(42)			(4)	CANADA	CANADA
HONG KONG			(8)		CANADA	CANADA
IRELAND				(1)	CANADA	CANADA
* ITALY			(10)		UK	USA
	(48)		(62)		UK	CANADA
	(97)		(156)		USA	USA
	(943)	(5)	(585)		CANADA	CANADA
			(278)		FRG	FRG
JAPAN	(37)	(3)		(21)	CANADA	CANADA
NETHERLANDS				(1)	CANADA	CANADA
* NORWAY	(1)	(2)			CANADA	CANADA

TABLE 5 (continued)
IMPORT OF RIVER OTTER (LUTRA CANADENSIS)

SKINS AND FINISHED PRODUCTS
(cont.)

COUNTRY	1977 SKIN	1977 FINISHED PRODUCT	1978 SKIN	1978 FINISHED PRODUCT	EXPORTING COUNTRY	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
SAUDI ARABIA		(1)			CANADA	CANADA
SPAIN			(42)		UK	-
		(3)			CANADA	CANADA
* SWEDEN		(2)		(4)	CANADA	CANADA
* SWITZERLAND			195		USA	CANADA
	108 (279)	1 (1)	(1,992)		USA	USA
			12 (13)	4	FRG	USA
			(2)	(1)	FRG	CANADA
	(1,540)	58 (79)	76 (1,024)	38 (45)	CANADA	-
			82 (82)		ITALY	
			8		UK	
* UNITED KINGDOM#	153 (49)				USA	-
	48 (49)	(6)	(24)	(6)	CANADA	-
			1		NORWAY	CANADA
* UNITED STATES		4 (4)	1	(1)	DENMARK	-
	2,256 (705)	1 (43)	1,924 (910)	14 (63)	CANADA	CANADA
	86 KG		18 KG		CANADA	CANADA
			177 (177)		FRG	CANADA
* WEST GERMANY	42 (128)			(40)	UK	-
	94 (94)		2,163 (2,066)	(42)	CANADA	-
	3,056 (434)		3,094 (3,644)		USA	-
				(1)	SWITZERLAND	-
			(168)		DENMARK	USA
TOTALS:	10,006 + 86 KG	87	16,976 + 18 KG	180		

* CITES Party Country
\# UK Import Figures for 1978 are partial.
( ) The number in parenthesis is the export figure listed in the exporting country's CITES Report.
Source: 1977 and 1978 CITES Reports by Canada, Denmark, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, West Germny, Italy, and Finland.

TABLE 6

IMPORT OF RIVER OTTER (LUTRA SPECIES)

SKINS AND FINISHED PRODUCTS

Importing Country	Species	Quantity 1977	Quantity 1978	Country of Origin or Re-export
FINLAND	Lutra lutra		9	USSR
SWITZERLAND	Lutra spp. (unspecified)		40	West Germany
		4		Turkey
		1		United Kingdom
	Lutra lutra	116		West Germany*
UNITED KINGDOM	Lutra lutra	20 (re-import)		Belgium
UNITED STATES	Lutra spp. (unspecified)	12		Argentina
WEST GERMANY	Lutra spp. (unspecified)	2,337		United Kingdom
		4,411	4,006	Peru
		39	54	Belize
		101	389	Panama
		8,349	17,273	Paraguay
		73	1	Argentina
		268		India
		681		Austria
			1,374	Bolivia
			162	Mexico
			272	Italy
			690	Iraq
			10 products	Argentina
			467 products	Greenland

* These skins reportedly originated in Paraguay, a country where L. lutra does not exist.

Source: 1977 and 1978 CITES Reports from Finland, the United Kingdom, the United States, West Germany and Switzerland.

TABLE 7A

OTTER SKINS IMPORTED INTO WEST GERMANY
(1979)

SPECIES	QUANTITY	DECLARED COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
Lutra canadensis	100 Skin	*Denmark
	1,403 "	Canada
	1,411 "	U.S.A.
	11 Garments	Canada
Lutra enudris	22 Skin	*Belize
	639 "	*Honduras
	63 "	*Panama
	20,260 "	*Paraguay
	2,314 "	*Peru
	5 Garments	*Argentina
Lutra incarum	511 Skin	*Austria
	385 "	*Panama
	156 "	*Paraguay

* Species not indigenous to country.

Source: 1979 West Germany CITES Annual Report.

TABLE 7B

OTTER SKINS RE-EXPORTED FROM WEST GERMANY
(1979)

SPECIES	QUANTITY	DESTINATION	DECLARED COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
Lutra enudris	40 Skin	Italy	*Bolivia
	60 "	Switzerland	*Colombia
	308 "	Austria	*Mexico
	442 "	Greenland	*Paraguay
	134 "	Netherlands	*Paraguay
	335 "	Austria	*Paraguay
	109 "	Switzerland	*Paraguay
	336 "	Netherlands	*Peru
	647 "	U.S.S.R.	*Peru
	2 Garments	Netherlands	*Paraguay
Lutra incarum	500 Skin	Greenland	*Paraguay
	130 "	Austria	*Paraguay
	3,300 "	Switzerland	*Paraguay
	290 "	Greenland	Peru
	1 "	Netherlands	Peru
	88 "	Switzerland	Peru
Lutra canadensis	60 Skin	Austria	Canada
	2 "	Switzerland	Canada
	4 Garments	France	Canada
	2 "	U.S.A.	Canada

* Species not indigenous to country.

Source: 1979 West Germany CITES Annual Report.